

Intimate Relationships

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[0 : 00] If you would take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter chapter 3, it's page 217 near the back, 217 at the back of the Bible.

The centre and heart of this first letter of Peter is of course the person of Jesus Christ, page 217. He's writing to people in the Greco-Roman Empire who are suffering for their Christian faith and he keeps pointing them back to the wonder of the person of Jesus Christ.

And he has just said Jesus is so precious that everything God is doing in this world, everything he's building in your life and mine, everything that he is building for eternity is built on the person, the one foundation stone of Jesus Christ.

And we who have come to follow him, he says, are like living stones. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people, a people belonging to God, which is the highest privilege that any human being can have.

[1 : 08] The problem is not everyone sees Jesus in that way. And that is why to call Jesus Lord is a very dangerous and subversive thing to do in Vancouver in 2007, almost as dangerous as it was in the Roman Empire in 60 AD.

You see, when you come to see Jesus as the one who embodies all the glory and all the hope and all the wonder of God, changes your life. And we begin to build on him and things that used to be vitally important to us before become irrelevant and things that were irrelevant become vitally important.

It's like an earthquake. Mountains rise where there are swamps and where there were mountains, it goes into the sea. I think a lot of people think that coming to church is a bit like a hobby. You know, we swim and we've got skiing and golf and coaching and all those things.

And those of us who are here this morning are into religion and when we can fit it in, we come. But you see, Peter is saying the opposite is true. The reason we are here is that we believe that God has done something so remarkable and so life-changing and so hope-filled in Jesus Christ that we want to build ourselves and our lives around him.

That's why in every culture where there are real followers of Jesus Christ, Christianity looks both good and threatening.

[2 : 37] Christians look bipolar to outsiders. We're wonderful citizens, well, hopefully. We're wonderful citizens, pay taxes, good neighbours, crazy generous, but we never get fully with the programme.

And we love the city, but we love the city because we love something more. And sometimes we do things that are just, they're very strange because we have this new Lord.

And one Peter has written to Christians in all sorts of tricky situations and he says, what does it mean to call Jesus as Lord as you walk out of the gathering? And what does it mean in the public arena, in the private arena, in every one of the structures of society?

Because if Jesus is Lord, everything else is dethroned. Every call for allegiance and everything else, every relationship, every structure, everything I do, family, finance, future, it all is now thought of in relation to Jesus Christ.

As Bruce was saying last week, some things that Christians do just look gobsmackingly brilliant. You know, very loving, very kind, heartbreakingly generous.

[3 : 50] At the same time, we're a bit weird. Some of the things we do and believe are just looked at as ethically backward. And when you become a minority in a culture, which Christianity does from time to time, it gains persecution.

So, as we think about ethical issues and moral issues as Christians, the simplest thing to say, really, is that Christianity is not growing towards an external standard.

Christianity is gradually being transformed by being in submission and building our lives on the person of Jesus Christ. And the change comes from the inside out. So, from halfway through chapter 2 to the end of chapter 3, what the Apostle does is he spells out what it looks like for Jesus to be Lord in a variety of different circumstances of our lives.

As Bruce said last week, it means always showing respect. It means doing things that are unquestioningly good because we follow in Christ's footsteps.

If you have your Bible open, look down at chapter 2, verse 21. For to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should trace your lives over his, follow in his steps.

[5 : 13] See, in the Greco-Roman world, the moral philosophers, when they talked about this kind of thing, were always talking about what is the supreme good, family, society, government, money. For us as Christians, we know what the supreme good is.

It is the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus lived a life in the shape of the cross. His life was cross-shaped. And he's left us an example.

He hasn't just forgiven our sins. He left us an example. And we trace the shape of the cross into our lives by our day-by-day behaviour. So, in verse 13 he says, be submissive to every human institution, not because the institution is any good, because of the Lord.

Now, why am I saying this? I'm saying this because chapter 3, verses 1 to 7, that was read for us this morning, must be seen in its context. You can't take it out, lift it out, as though it's some kind of marriage manual.

Look at verse 1. Peter says, likewise you wives, verse 7, likewise you husbands, everything in chapter 2 comes into play. When you're starting to build your life on the person of Jesus Christ, every area becomes related to him.

[6 : 28] So, chapter 3, verses 1 to 7, Peter applies what he has been saying already. It's very tricky. One of the highest values in the Greco-Roman world was that both partners must worship the same gods.

Plutarch, who wrote a couple of years after this, wrote that the wife must know only the gods her husband believes in and shut the door tight on all strange rituals and outlandish superstitions.

So, you see, imagine this. Here is a pagan couple. They have heard the Christian gospel and the wife has become a believer. She begins to build her life on Jesus Christ.

Suddenly, it puts her in a precarious position. What is she to do? Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3, likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour.

We've got to say right up the front, haven't we, that this passage has been used and abused to justify all kinds of wickedness, to validate the degradation of women and violence against women as though it gives carte blanche to a husband who's a bully.

[7 : 48] There's nothing here or in all of scripture which justifies spousal abuse nor justifies a wife remaining in an abusive relationship. And I just say it now, the longer you're in a relationship like this, the greater the shame and the more difficult it is to speak about it.

And if you are in a situation on either side of this coin, I encourage you to speak to someone you trust today. Bring it into the light. And I think we need to slow down at this point and listen carefully to what God is saying lest we miss it.

And I think it's so important for us to place this passage back into its context to see that it's part of what it means to follow the crucified Jesus. That's what it's about.

Submission is not the key issue in this passage. Christ is. And we've got to avoid any kind of legalism that turns this passage into a kind of absolute principle.

Submission is never an absolute value as we're going to look at in just a moment. It's also important for me to say this Peter does not say and the Bible does not say that women should submit to men generally.

[9 : 02] It's speaking specifically in the marriage relationship. And I think this is very difficult to hear, particularly in a culture which is so confused and so confident about gender roles.

And it's led some commentators to say, well, clearly this is outmoded advice. Peter is making an accommodation for women in the Greco-Roman world. We live in a different world.

We've got rid of slavery. We ought to do the same with this idea of submission. It's a throwback to a patriarchal, obsolete, bigoted injustice. The only problem is I don't think the text allows us to do that. See, look down at verse 7. When Peter is speaking to husbands, he commands them, honour your wives. Why?

Because they're joint heirs in the grace of life. Why should you honour your wife if you're a Christian husband? It's because of her complete equality with you. So you see, here in the same passage, the Apostle Peter speaks about submission and equality, the two things together.

[10:12] And unless he forgot what he wrote a couple of sentences before, for Peter, submission does not mean inequality. I think it's also vaguely insulting to put marriage and slavery into the same basket.

Slavery is an institution created by sinful human beings. Marriage is an institution created by God. There's no suggestion here that submission should be a temporary cultural thing.

It's the same word that the Apostle Paul uses to Christian wives in Ephesians. And I think we have to say it's not outmoded and it's not unhelpful and it transcends culture and its historical setting. So how should we read it? How do we read a passage and avoid the disfiguring legalism that so many have read into the passage? And I want to suggest to you that Peter sets before us four principles.

You may be single, you may be married, you may have lost a partner. It's very important that we all hear these four principles. Let me run through them.

[11:21] Firstly, the submission of a Christian wife is God-centered, not husband-centered. See, Peter does not call on the wife to submit to a husband's beliefs.

just the opposite. She's made a response of faith. She's started to build a life on Jesus Christ. She's made up her own mind. He's the precious cornerstone.

Peter comes to her and says, you know, you disagree with your husband on the most important issue in the universe. Keep it up. Socially, very radical for Peter to do this.

He affirms the wife's choice of a different religion. So, at the very least, we need to say that Christian submission doesn't mean agreeing with the husband on everything. Peter encourages the Christian wife not to submit to a husband's beliefs but to grow closer to Christ and more like Christ each day.

I think you see something of this the second time he mentions submission. Down in verse 5. So once, the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands.

[12:36] See, the holy women in the Old Testament, they didn't submit to their husbands because they thought their husbands were superior to them or cleverer to them or they thought they'd get into trouble if they didn't submit. They did it because they placed their hope in God.

And that is why submission, you see, is God-centered, not husband-centered. Christian women don't place their hope in their husbands but in God alone.

They don't place their hope in getting a husband but in the God who has given us a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's the first principle. Submission is God-centered.

Secondly, Christian submission is spiritually motivated not self-motivated. Not only does Peter encourage the wife in her faith but he urges her to do what she can to bring about the conversion of her husband.

It's amazing, isn't it? So that submission has this long-term spiritual intention to it. And when Peter says that the husband will be one without a word, he doesn't mean that the husband will become a Christian without ever hearing the gospel but I think if you look here and if you look elsewhere in the Bible it means that the closer the relationship the more difficult is for words to be persuasive.

[14:01] The closer the relationship the more effective the ongoing inner transformation it is. He's saying don't nag your husband if he's not a Christian. The husband has to hear the gospel or else he really won't know what's going on for his wife he'll just think what a clever chappy I am to have married her.

But you see if he's resisting the gospel if he will not obey the word he's not going to be reached by brilliant arguments but by the ongoing living demonstration of the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

And I want to say to those of us this morning who are Christian wives and your husband is not a Christian this is very encouraging. He's not saying you have to be Mrs. Perfect but he's saying that as you put your hope in God there is the chance that your husband may be one gained for you as a brother gained by Christ as a precious man of God.

So that the greatest gift a Christian wife can give any husband Christian or non-Christian is that she loves God more than her husband or better and more accurately she loves God so that she might love her husband rightly.

That's the second. Thirdly submission is inwardly focused not outwardly focused verses 3 and 4. Let yours sorry let not yours be the outward adorning the braiding of hair decoration of gold wearing of fine clothing let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet isn't the right word tranquil spirit so that in God's which in God's side is very precious.

[15 : 45] Now Peter is not saying Christian wives forget about your appearance you can look as ugly as you like he's not against jewellery any more than he's against clothing per se. God is much more interested in values not prices.

He's interested in the beauty that comes from within not from the fashion industry and when relating to a non-Christian husband Christian woman cannot you can't depend on your cosmetics they are not going to do the trick for you.

You can look as fabulous as you like but that will not compare with the transforming power of what's going on inside. The inner beauty of your character which has a power to last quietness and tranquility which does not mean being servile dull wallflower it means being in control setting your hope not on your cosmetics but on God and I just we should spend more time on this but I think this spills over for our daughters gosh we are we're living in a culture which is the most highly sexualized and fashion conscious culture ever what Peter points us to here is that true beauty is affirming the inner character not just the outward beauty we need to encourage our girls and our daughters in what is real and eternal and not what is external and fashionable as someone said to me between the services we should compare the budget that we spend on the internal the inner transformation and the outer transformation

I didn't think that was fair myself but do you see what Peter is saying if your husband is not a Christian provoke him with your purity hound him with your spiritual beauty now Peter is not just writing to wives with non-Christian husbands in verse 1 it's clear that some are not Christian but this is for all Christian women who are married fourthly Christian submission is based on freedom not fear just look at the second half of verse 6 you are now Sarah's children if you do right and let nothing terrify you Christian submission cannot be coerced or demanded by any husband it does not mean obedience to or conforming to the will of the husband if the husband seeks to lead the wife into sin Christian submission means for the wife to say no to him and again there's nothing that would justify living in a kind of relationship where you are abused and I know some women have read this passage I think and misunderstood it in this way in the past if Christ

Jesus is your Lord you are free to do what he says and there's never any expectation you should live in terror or be exposed to violence or malicious neglect or serial infidelity I know this is a very tender area but if I say again if you're in this kind of relationship you should speak to someone today you are you are Christ's person you are in his hand you are under his care so Christian submission for the Christian wife looks like this it's God centered it's spiritually motivated it's inwardly focused and it's based on freedom not fear and now for a moment we move to the husbands who have been nervously waiting their turn verse 7 likewise again picking up chapter 2 likewise you husbands live considerately with your wives bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex since you are joint heirs of the grace of life in order that your prayers may not be hindered if you're a

[19 : 48] Christian husband and someone said to you what does God expect of you as a Christian bloke what does he expect what are your responsibilities as a Christian man in marriage I wonder if you know what to say Peter here lays out four principles again and I'll look at them very quickly for Christian men the first is that Christian husbands are meant to partner with their wives in the original where it says live with your wives it's a very unusual word and the emphasis is on with so the Christian marriage is not meant to be a power struggle but a partnership where husbands you are to focus on the with part you are to focus on the home life in other words the biblical expectation is that Christian husbands will be attentive to domestic issues you will be present in the ongoing administration of family affairs that's the first thing secondly considerately this is a wonderful word

literally it means according to knowledge live live according to knowledge with your woman in other words the husband is not meant to be just physically present not just meant to be interested in what's going on domestically but he is meant to be so engaged with his wife that he knows what's going on for her in her

Peter doesn't use the usual word for wives it says your woman because she's different so the question Peter would ask us is husbands do you know what's going on for your wives do you know what she's struggling with do you know what she's hoping for do you know what she thinks her strengths and her weaknesses are that's what considerably means it's much more than being polite and civil and sort of passive aggressive it's much more than just not being an abuser not being a deadbeat it means knowing your wife what she fears what she loves that's the second thing thirdly Peter says bestow honour as a joint heir of the grace of life again this is the furthest thing from patriarchy this is absolutely radical in the Greco-Roman world if you're a Christian marriage for you as a man does not mean a license to do as you think or to think as you wish

Peter is telling Christian men treat your wives as Christian sisters you need to be attentive to her spiritual needs you need to have the same respect for her as any other Christian believer because her faith is just as important as yours is so you see the well-being of the family depends on the husband recognising his wife and honouring his wife as a co-heir men you cannot leave the temperature the spiritual temperature of your family to your wife you cannot abdicate the spiritual nurture of your children to your wife and fourthly and finally Peter says that your prayers might be fruitful or not hindered and I think there's a little bit of a sting in the tail here what this means is that if you are avoiding your domestic responsibilities or if you are an absent husband or if you are not honouring your wife spiritually

God will not honour your prayers and I think that assumes you take the lead in prayer in your family now in some churches they have a question and answer time and I'm mighty tempted to stop and have some questions and answers because that would be helpful but I don't think we've got time to do that today let me just try and gather up the strands and say three things the first is this if you are a Christian person and married and you have a 1 Peter 3 wife or a 1 Peter 3 husband give thanks to God don't take it for granted secondly a word to wives I think God is calling you to something that's very different than what the culture affirms something that is very strong and beautiful but it takes a tremendous amount of grace and humility and I want to ask you are you submitting along the lines that the apostle lays out here there is a way to abdicate your spiritual responsibility and just be compliant just be a doormat that is not the way of

Christ is your hope in God if we could poll your husband would he say that you are spiritually motivated and growing in those inequalities that Christ thinks are so precious if you're not following in the way of Christ you need to repent and turn back to him for his forgiveness and ask for his grace to help you a word to husbands God is calling you to something that's very different than the culture lays out for us as well something that I think requires a deep and long attentiveness are you living with your wives in the way the apostle commands here or are you just being easy going there is a way to abdicate your spiritual responsibility in your family and that is not the way of Christ and if we polled your wives would they say you are a partner in the home that you know her well and that you are honouring her spiritually if you are not following in the way of Christ here your prayers will be useless and you need to repent and seek his forgiveness and grace to help you and finally

[25 : 59] I want to leave us all married single divorced with the last verse of chapter two this is the very verse before the section starts it's a beautiful verse Peter says for you were straying like sheep but have now returned converted literally to the shepherd and guardian of your souls we are a lot like sheep we stray all the time and when we are strayed and when we are lost you know what he did he came and he sought us and he found us and he laid us on his shoulder and he brought us back to his flock and you know what he does with us there in the flock he watches us he guards us and he shepherds us and that means there is nothing to be afraid of we are under his care and as Peter says it is his joy to keep us forever amen it is his joy to keep us forever amen thank you many no